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ABSTRACT

Because student ratings of their instructors are frequently used by colleges in making personnel decisions and because a variety of course, student, and instructor characteristics may be significantly related to these ratings, academic departments should investigate their student evaluation process. Responses on 1292 student evaluation of instruction questionnaires collected in 81 university psychology classes were analyzed. Factor analysis of the evaluation items yielded two factors which were named "instructor evaluation" and "student motivation." Multiple regression analysis identified several instructor, student, and course characteristics which were significant predictors of these factor scores when the effects of other characteristics were held constant. The variables "expected grade in course," "instructor age," and "instructor status as full-time or part-time faculty member" had a small, but significant, effect on both "instructor evaluation" and "student motivation." Students tended to rate their instructors and their own motivation more positively when they expected higher grades, had younger instructors, and had full-time faculty instructors. Two variables, "course level" and "status of course in student's degree program," had a small, but significant, effect only on "student motivation." The results suggest that the seven different instructor-evaluation items seem largely to be tapping a single evaluative dimension. (Author/NRB)

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# STUDENT EVALUATIONS OF PSYCHOLOGY INSTRUCTORS

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# STUDENT EVALUATIONS OF PSYCHOLOGY INSTRUCTORS

The mode of faculty evaluation in which students rate their instructors on anonymous questionnaires is widely used in American colleges and universities (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1979). Because these student ratings are frequently used in making personnel decisions, and because it is known that a variety of course characteristics, student characteristics, and instructor characteristics are significantly related to student ratings in some circumstances (Centra, 1978; McKeachie, 1979; Schultz, 1978), it seems advisable for academic departments to investigate the student evaluation process, as it occurs within the particular circumstances of their institutions and disciplines. This is a report of the methods and findings of such an investigation within the Department of Psychology at Humboldt State University.

## Procedure

Responses on 1292 student evaluation questionnaires collected by departmental secretarial staff in 81 Psychology classes during 1979 were analyzed. Sets of evaluations were obtained for 48 different course numbers - five different lower division courses, 26 different upper division courses, and 17 different graduate (M.A. level) courses. These evaluations applied to 27 different instructors, ranging in rank from part-time lecturers to tenured full professors. The student evaluation process was mandatory for part-time faculty, non-tenured faculty, and associate professors intending to apply for promotion.

The student questionnaire consisted of seven instructor-evaluation items, two self-evaluation items, and two course-evaluation items. Each of these items was rated on a five-point scale. In addition, the questionnaire included

seven items regarding student characteristics.

Results

In this set of evaluation questionnaires, the general response of students to their instructors was very favorable. The mean ratings on all seven instructor evaluation items were between 2.0 and 1.5, where 1 was the highest rating possible. The mean ratings on self-evaluation items and course-evaluation items were somewhat lower -- between 3.0 and 2.0.

Responses on the eleven evaluation items were factor analyzed by the method of principal factoring with iteration, using a varimax rotation. A two-factor solution produced the closest approximation to simple structure.

Table 1 shows that all seven of the instructor-evaluation items had loadings over .60 on Factor I, with the "overall teaching effectiveness" item having the highest loading. This factor was named "instructor evaluation."

Table 2 presents factor loadings for the four items which loaded on Factor II. A course-evaluation item which asked students to rate their "expectation that course material will be useful" had the highest loading. Two self-evaluation items ("original interest in subject" and "class participation"), as well as one instructor-evaluation item ("ability to stimulate interest") loaded at lower levels on Factor II. This factor was named "student motivation."

A set of factor scores was generated for each factor by simple averaging of the relevant item scores on each questionnaire. Thus, an "instructor evaluation" factor score and a "student motivation" factor score were computed for each questionnaire.

Multiple regression analysis was used to identify the instructor, student, and course characteristics which were significant predictors of "instructor evaluation" and "student motivation." Tables 3 and 4 show the following

variables which were regressed on Factor I scores and on Factor II scores: instructor sex, instructor age, instructor rank, student year in school, student major, student age, student sex, student grade-point-average, expected grade in class, course level, and status of course in student's degree program. The correlations with the factor scores, the beta coefficients, F-ratios, and significance levels are presented for each of these variables.

Both regressions resulted in Multiple R values which were statistically significant, but small. The best combination of predictors could account for only 13% of the variance in "instructor evaluation" scores and for only 12% of the variance in "student motivation" scores.

Standardized regression coefficients and mean scores for various categories of questionnaires were inspected in order to explicate the relationship of specific instructor, student, and course variables to Factor I and Factor II scores.

Three variables had a small, but significant, effect on both "instructor evaluation" and "student motivation," when the effects of other variables were held constant. These were 1) expected grade in class, 2) instructor age, and 3) instructor status as full-time or part-time faculty member. Students tended to rate their instructors and their own motivation more positively when they expected higher grades, had younger instructors, and had instructors who were full-time faculty.

Two variables had a small, but significant, effect on "student motivation" only, when the effects of other variables were held constant. These were 1) course level and 2) status of course in student's degree program. Students in graduate courses had higher motivation scores than students in upper division courses, who in turn had higher scores than students in lower division courses. For students in lower division courses only, those taking

courses which did not apply to requirements in their majors had higher motivation scores than those taking courses which did apply to major requirements.

Discussion

Within this set of 1292 questionnaires, the seven different instructor-evaluation items seem largely to be tapping a single evaluative dimension. The item which asks students to rate their instructors' "overall teaching effectiveness" is probably the best single measure of this dimension.

The value of extraneous student and course characteristics in predicting instructor evaluation ratings is reassuringly low. It does not seem that teaching a particular category of student or type of course gives instructors a significant edge in instructor-evaluation ratings (although two course variables were significantly related to student motivation ratings).

It is possible that instructors of classes where many students expect high grades (due to high student achievement, instructor leniency, or other factors) have a small advantage in the student evaluation process. Other investigators have also found significant relationships between expected grade and student ratings of instruction (Stumpf and Freedman, 1979; Vasta and Sarmiento, 1979). Perhaps class grade distributions should be included with student evaluation questionnaires when the latter are considered in personnel reviews.

Two instructor characteristics -- age and full-time vs. part-time status -- had small, but significant, relationships to instructor evaluation scores. These relationships are interesting to ponder and may deserve further investigation. Centra (1978) reports that college teachers with less than three years or more than 12 years of experience tend to receive lower student ratings than teachers in the middle range of experience. Some older

instructors may become stale and out of touch with contemporary student needs. Part-time instructors may be relatively inexperienced and/or suffer from professional isolation. Perhaps departments should recognize the potential problems of both groups and attempt to provide meaningful support.

Table 1

Factor I: Instructor Evaluation

| Items | Factor Loadings |
|---|---|
| Knowledge of subject | .734 |
| Clarity of presentation | .837 |
| Openness | .641 |
| Overall teaching effectiveness | .863 |
| Preparation and organization | .738 |
| Clarity of assignments and grading | .608 |
| Ability to stimulate interest | .624 |

Table 2

Factor II: Student Motivation

| Items | Factor Loadings |
|---|---|
| Your original interest in subject | .532 |
| Your level of class participation | .416 |
| Your expectation that course material will be useful | .735 |
| Instructor's ability to stimulate interest | .497 |

Table 3

Multiple Regression on Factor I Scores

| Variable | r | Beta | F | p less than |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Instructor sex | .18 | .05 | 1.9 | .163 |
| Instructor age | .11 | .20 | 25.7 | .001 * |
| Instructor rank | -.16 | -.23 | 39.2 | .001 * |
| Student year in school | -.15 | .01 | 0.1 | .753 |
| Student major | -.15 | -.05 | 1.9 | .163 |
| Student age | -.16 | -.08 | 3.8 | .052 |
| Student sex | .10 | .05 | 3.5 | .060 |
| Student GPA | -.13 | -.00 | 0.0 | .911 |
| Expected grade | -.23 | -.19 | 34.0 | .001 * |
| Course level | -.05 | .04 | 1.3 | .256 |
| Status of course in degree program | -.12 | .01 | 0.0 | .817 |

$R = .36$ $R^2 = .13$ $p < .001$

Table 4

Multiple Regression on Factor II Scores

| Variable | r | Beta | F | p less than |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Instructor sex | .10 | .04 | 1.6 | .212 |
| Instructor age | .04 | .10 | 6.0 | .015 * |
| Instructor rank | -.10 | -.12 | 9.7 | .002 * |
| Student year in school | -.15 | .04 | 0.8 | .869 |
| Student major | -.10 | -.02 | 0.2 | .644 |
| Student age | -.16 | -.07 | 3.4 | .064 |
| Student sex | .02 | -.01 | 0.1 | .744 |
| Student GPA | -.19 | -.04 | 1.2 | .272 |
| Expected grade | -.29 | -.25 | 59.3 | .001 * |
| Course level | -.13 | -.10 | 6.7 | .010 * |
| Status of course in degree program | -.03 | .09 | 6.5 | .011 * |

$R = .34$ $R^2 = .12$ $p < .001$

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